Ghosts in Shirley Jackson's *The Haunting of Hill House* and Amy Tan's *The Hundred Secret Senses*

A socio-historical and cultural approach

Anna Meneghin
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University of Helsinki
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Tiivistelmä – Referat – Abstract

The present thesis focuses on the analysis of Shirley Jackson's *The Haunting of Hill House* (1959) and of Amy Tan's *The Hundred Secret Senses* (1995). Hans Robert Jauss' theory of the "horizon of expectations" is used as theoretical background to support the analysis. A socio-historical and cultural approach is adopted when considering how the authors engage with the device of ghosts in their novels. In particular, it is argued that the ghosts are used to deliver messages on the topics of mental illness and of the process of identity-building, respectively. Following Jauss' theory, it is also argued that the contemporary reader is facilitated in the identification of such messages due to the differences in the socio-historical and cultural conditions when compared with the time of publication of the novels. The thesis also provides background information that helps creating a contextual frame for a better understanding and identification of the above-mentioned issues in the novels. The Secondary Sources section includes material on the following topics: the cultural and literary evolution of ghosts in both Western and Chinese frameworks, the development of the haunted house narrative, social stigmatisation of mental illness in American society, and the formation of identity in mixed-background individuals.

The findings of this thesis strengthen the validity of reader-oriented criticism and of the importance of the role of readers in the reception and assimilation of literary works. Moreover, the results of the analysis of the two novels suggest that Jauss' theory involves a wide scope of experiences that contribute to the formation of the different "horizons of expectations." These experiences involve both the public and the private spheres of life.

Thus, in addition to the socio-historical dimension as already highlighted by Jauss, cultural knowledge and subjective approach to a certain topic concur with the formation of the "horizons" and with the consequent reception of a literary work. This finding not only validates Jauss' theory on the mutability of the significance of a literary work through decades, but it also shows that an informed approach to a literary work necessitates more than taking into consideration historical distance alone. This also clarifies the importance of reading both novels not only in their socio-historical framework, but also in their cultural and literary context. This process contributes to a better reception of the meanings of a literary work and to the supplementary possibility of identifying issues that might otherwise be misplaced and overlooked.

Avainsanat – Nyckelord – Keywords

Shirley Jackson, Amy Tan, ghosts, American literature

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Contents

1. Introduction

This study discusses two novels that include the element of ghosts: Shirley Jackson's *The Haunting of Hill House* (1959) and Amy Tan's *The Hundred Secret Senses* (1995). I will argue that Jackson and Tan, although influenced by the tradition of the ghost stories, dissociate themselves from the mainstream use of ghosts as devices of terror. The choice of focusing on ghosts is motivated by the prospect of investigating whether Jackson and Tan managed to productively deconstruct the tradition linked with one of the most classical devices in literature. The subsequent exploration of how the authors handled this deconstructed tradition brings to a reflection on the new role of ghosts in their novels. In this sense, I will argue that, in re-elaborating the function of ghosts in their works, they focus on socio-historical and cultural issues which were central at the time of the publication of each novel, but which also speak to contemporary readers. The analysis of *The Haunting of Hill House* aims at identifying a correlation between the characters' approach to the mentally troubled protagonist and the stigma towards mental illness in the American society of the 1950s. By showing how the characters are a mirror of this societal attitude, it is demonstrated how the ghosts of Hill House are used as innovative devices to highlight the issue itself. The study of *The Hundred Secret Senses* focuses on the link between the discovery of the protagonist's identity and her progressive acceptance of the presence of the supernatural in her life. Scholarly studies concerning the stages of the formation of identity in mixed-background individuals are used to support such parallelism. Thus, it is demonstrated how Tan's ghosts become an integral part of the protagonist's journey towards self-discovery and how they contribute to the discourse regarding multiculturalism and immigration in the U.S.

In analysing the two novels, Hans Robert Jauss' elaboration of the reader-response theory is also applied. According to his "horizon of expectations," readers tend to approach and decode a text by following socio-historical conventions that belong to the precise historical moment that they live in. Thus, since the reception of a text is ever changing, this thesis highlights the possibility of identifying specific topics in the two novels. This is possible due to a more elaborated awareness in contemporary readers regarding the topics of mental health and multiculturalism, which then lead to the identification of hints that may have been overlooked at the author's time. The analysis of the two novels follows a binary approach, since a socio-historical method is adopted when discussing *The Haunting of Hill House*, whereas a cultural one is used in the study of *The Hundred Secret Senses*. On the one hand, the analysis of Jackson's novel relies on a traditional application of Jauss' theory, as the historical distancing

that creates the two "horizons" can be applied in a proper way. Moreover, knowledge on the set of beliefs that brough to social stigmatisation during the American 1950s helps contemporary readers with the analysis of the contemporary approach to the topic. This leads to the formation of the two "horizon of expectations" as suggested by Jauss. On the other hand, Tan's novel requires an expansion of Jauss' theory due to the closer date of publication which impedes historical distancing. Since Tan's novel focuses on a topic that involves the individual rather than the community, the importance of cultural background knowledge on the topic of identity-building in a multicultural environment is related with the private sphere rather than with the societal one. This binary approach to the novels leads to the finding that the formation of Jauss' theory can be expanded, as the elements that create the "horizons" derive from the contribution of both collective and personal knowledge.

The first chapter offers an introductory overview of the cultural and literary development of ghosts in Western tradition. It also supplies a brief analysis of two literary examples that contributed to the solidification of the tradition of the ghost stories during the 19th century. The second chapter outlines Hans Robert Jauss' theory of the "horizon of expectations," which constitutes the theoretical framework used in the analysis of the two books. Each of two chapters that study the novels is opened by a biographical section on the author.

In the analysis of Jackson's *The Haunting of Hill House,* the biographical section is followed by an outline of the development of the literary *topos* of the haunted house, which thus provides the tools to evaluate Jackson's contribution. The synopsis of the novel is followed by the core analysis which focuses on the representation of mental health by considering the link between the character's attitude towards the protagonist and the protagonist's boundary with the haunted mansion. In doing so, the approach to the topic of mental health in the American 1950s is also addressed.

The analysis of Tan's *The Hundred Secret Senses* is supported by an overview of the representation of ghosts in Chinese literature and by an account of scholarly studies which focused on the formation of identity in Chinese-Americans. Such background knowledge permits the delineation of a more competent discourse around the role of ghosts in the protagonist's rediscovery of her Chinese origins.

By highlighting the articulateness of these novels and the difficulty in labelling them, this thesis also wants to stimulate the evaluation of the results of distancing oneself from literary categories, thus encouraging readers to be as independent as possible when approaching a

literary work. While an academic in-depth analysis of this point is impossible, as it lies outside the central focus of this thesis, readers will nonetheless hopefully be stimulated to acquire such an independent critical sensibility that they will be driven towards the identification of a broader range of meanings and themes, if compared with their extent as planned by the conventional literary labelling. Moreover, since this awareness relies on the reader's personal approach and response to the novels, the application of such attitude not only to the novels analysed in this thesis, but to literature in general is both speculated and auspicated. In this sense, it is important to underline how this work does not want to criticise or, much less, to encourage the abandonment of literary labelling per se. On the contrary, literary categories and definitions are going to be vital to support the theories expressed in this thesis. A complete elimination of labels to promulgate freedom of thought in readers would inevitably bring to a literary chaos. It is thus fundamental to highlight that the ability to approach a literary text without constrains does not depend on the elimination of the constrains themselves, but rather on skills that readers need to train every time they approach a text.

1.1. The evolution of ghosts

With their having a central role in the exploration of "the relationship between life and death, the body and the soul, man and his universe and the philosophical conditions of that universe, the nature of evil" (Briggs 1977: 23), ghosts are key figures used not only in the narrative of terror, but in any literary work that wants to reflect on human nature. From the ghastly myths of Ancient Greece to the séances in Victorian era, passing through the rediscovery of occultism during the 15th and 16th centuries, the different ways in which ghosts haunted humans and humans' approach to ghosts themselves mirrored fundamental social, cultural, and historical changes. Thus, "[e]ach epoch has perceived its spectres according to specific sets of expectations; as these change so too do the spectres" (Finucane 1996: 223). In Ancient Greece, for example, ghosts switched from being represented as usually harmless shadows in Homer's works to frightening presences during the age of Pericles, thus becoming closer to the stereotype of ghost as present in the Victorian ghost stories. This change can be explained, among other reasons, by a moment of social and political instability, which would cause irrational fears to proliferate (5–6). During the late Middle Ages, the formation of Christian concepts like Hell, Paradise, and Purgatory thinned the limits with the Afterlife by allowing spirits to be reached through prayers and offers (46–47).

Later, the integration of ghosts in daily life endured stark criticism during the age of Enlightenment, when they became "victims of eighteenth-century rationality and wit" and "examples of the belief of the common folk" (169). Ghosts were not the only victims of the rationality of the Enlightenment. Dominated by the ancient Greek and Roman literary tradition, the Enlightenment underlined the superiority of classical harmony over "ideas of barbarous customs and practices, of superstition, ignorance, extravagant fancies and natural wildness" (Botting 1996: 22). The literary expressions of the "Gothic," as this reverse of the Enlightenment was called, received criticism for their lack of moral lessons, thus being "irrational, improper and immoral wastes of time" despite their increasing popularity among readers (45).

The Castle of Otranto by Horace Walpole, published in 1764, is generally regarded as the milestone in the landscape of Gothic fiction (Punter and Byron 2004: 177), and it represents one of the first attempts to elevate the presence of supernatural figures as devices of terror in the Gothic tradition. After the 1790s, which is defined by Botting as "the decade of Gothic fiction" (1996: 62) with works by, among others, Ann Radcliffe, William Godwin, and M. G. Lewis, the gloominess that characterises Gothic literature becomes symbol of "inner mental and emotional states" during the Romanticism (92).

Ghost stories became extremely popular during the Victorian era, the Golden Age of the genre. While society had to face two quick transformations, namely democracy and industrialism, which Michael Cox and R. A. Gilbert call the "forces of transition" (2003: ix), ghost stories exemplified the nostalgic revitalisation of the past. In the European folklore, which attracted renewed interest during the 19th century, "some of the accounts collected were tales of apparitions and hauntings, which in this way entered the permitted range of interests of the educated classes" (Finucane 1996: 176). This produced ghost stories which were no longer set in isolated castles, but in the darkness of the alienating and industrialised city (Botting 1996: 123). By challenging the boundary between the supernatural world and the domestic one, ghost stories evoked a sense of uncanny because they "focused on the vacillation between real and supernatural dimensions" (126). Similarly, Punter and Byron suggest that "Victorian ghost stories typically centre on the irruption of the supernatural into the familiar, comfortable and … the mundane everyday world" (2004: 27). It may be correct to state that this irruption was supported by an active attempt to combine what had always been considered at the opposites, namely science and spiritualism, to find empirical evidences of the existence of the protagonists of the so popular ghost stories. Interestingly, science had a double role in this twine. The

proliferation of scientific and pseudoscientific experiments to demonstrate the existence of ghosts indicates the Victorians' faith in the scientific method. At the same time, the attempt to find such evidences shows that "ghosts challenge or at least question the authority of science and reason" (27), thus highlighting the implicit contradiction of using science to demonstrate something which is the refusal of science itself. The objectification of ghosts as case studies during the Victorian Age was the peak of their progressive detachment from "the concerns of everyday life" (Finucane 1996: 222) which started in the eighteenth century. Among the reasons behind this detachment from the worldly issues may be the collapse of the importance attributed to family lineage, which released people from "ancestral demands" (222) and from the consequent need to nourish the bond with the ancestors.

During the twentieth century, the increasing technological development introduced the topics of "loss of human identity and the alienation of self" through "dehumanised environments, machinic doubles and violent, psychotic fragmentation" (Botting 1996: 157). In explaining the re-elaboration of the haunted house and of the ghost, Botting highlights how the personal acquires new meaning and importance in the Gothic narrative of the twentieth century. Additionally, horror and anxiety are no longer generated by the mere fear of the unknown, but by the crisis of values of modernity seen as a mixture of "civilisation, progress and rationality" (169). Loss of identity and lack of stability in the grounding values of society are precisely some of the central issues represented in the two novels analysed in this thesis. If *The Haunting of Hill House* shows the progressive disintegration of mental health, *The Hundred Secret Senses* revolves around the discovery of the Chinese roots of the protagonist and on the construction of her whole identity.

Ghost stories have always been playing with humans' deepest fears, like the uncertainty of the existence of the afterlife and the eventuality of having to face something that cannot be explained by reason. Nonetheless, if the suggestive effect that the word "ghost" has on the subconscious is suspended, it is possible to analyse how and for which purposes authors have been using ghosts as literary devices in recent years if compared with the "traditional" ghosts of the past. As highlighted in the "Introduction," this thesis argues that the ghosts contained in the two novels are the result of a deconstruction and, later, of a re-elaboration of this literary device. In order to better understand the ways in which such deconstruction and re-elaboration were performed by the authors, giving some accounts of this tradition is necessary.

1.2. Ghost stories: examples from the tradition

The novels seem to have two distinct approaches to the tradition of the Victorian ghost story. On the one hand, *The Haunting of Hill House* is the novel that can be linked to the template of the haunted house short story in the easiest way. On the other hand, the Chinese ghosts in Amy Tan's more recent *The Hundred Secret Senses* seem to be completely independent from the traditional Victorian spirits. As for *The Haunting of Hill House*, Edgar Allan Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher" (1839) and J. Sheridan Le Fanu's "An Account of Some Strange Disturbances in Aungier Street" (1853) may represent two examples from the 19th century that established the tradition of the haunted house. Since the ghosts in *The Hundred Secret Senses* are not within the scope of the present study due to their detachment from the Victorian tradition, the necessary information on the notion of ghosts in Chinese tradition will be provided in the chapter dedicated to Tan's novel.

1.2.1. Edgar Allan Poe, "The Fall of the House of Usher" (1839)

The short-story recounts the experience of the narrator, who adopts a first-person point of view, in the mysterious and decadent house of the Usher family. Here, the narrator offers moral support to the owner of the house, Roderick Usher, who is devastated by the progressively worsening and, finally, fatal sickness of his twin sister, lady Madeline. After her death, the coffin is placed in one of the rooms of the house waiting for the funeral, which is set to be held after two weeks. In conjunction with his sister's death, Roderick Usher, seems to lose any last glimpse of mental health and he starts behaving in such a way that the narrator suspects madness as explanation. One night the narrator is reading a novel to Usher in an attempt to mitigate his excitement when noises coming from a distant part of the house are suddenly heard. If these noises are at first faint, their growth in intensity coincides with Roderick Usher's increasingly unusual behaviour. When the worried narrator approaches him, Usher reveals that they buried lady Madeline alive. Despite having realised the mistake days ago, he left the sister in the coffin. This realisation coincides with the appearance of the enshrouded figure of lady Madeline who, after having collapsed over her brother, dies. Roderick Usher dies as well out of fear, whereas the terrified narrator runs from the house of Usher. The story ends with the destruction of the house. Despite being unrealistic in its suddenness, the physical destruction of the house fits the story in its being the symbol of the end of the Usher family.

Although the main circumstance that Poe uses to arouse terror is lady Madeline's premature burial, the central role of the house has interested many of the critics who approached the short story (Thompson 1973: 88). Thompson underlines how the destruction of the house at the end of the short story reflects "the sinking of the rational part of the mind" (90). The mind which succumbs is primarily Roderick Usher's one, overwhelmed by the dreadful awareness of having contributed to lady Madeline's death, but the narrator himself is equally influenced by the atmosphere of the house. Thus, the tragic end of the short story is prefigured from the very beginning, when the narrator finds himself in front of the house for the first time. The building seems to embody each characteristic of the traditional haunted house and the fact that "with the first glimpse of the building, a sense of insufferable gloom pervaded my spirit" ("House of Usher": 138) the connection between the house and the danger for the mental stability of the occupants of the house is quickly created. Edward Davidson suggests a complete identification of the house with the human being, stating that the external structure represents the body, the small and stagnant lake near the house represents the mind, and the thin fracture that runs from the roof to the foundations represents the progressive destruction of the house as metaphor of the "whole psychic being" (197). The house of the Usher family is not infested by a ghost that can be completely defined as such. Although the narrator's first and only glimpse of lady Madeline while still alive does resemble a ghostly encounter, the crumbling state of the house seems to be caused by its identification with Roderick's mental state rather than with the corrupting effect of the presence of a spirit among its walls.

In its being a *doppelgänger* of its inhabitants, Poe's house is remarkably close to the house in Shirley Jackson's *The Haunting of Hill House*. It is worth highlighting how the progressive deterioration of the mental stability of Jackson's protagonist and her ultimate death seem to be linked to the house in the same way in which the Ushers are linked to their mansion. The death of Eleanor Vance that marks the end of the novel accepts two possible interpretations. If, at first, Eleanor seems to claim the authorship of her extreme act in such a way that it becomes a self-aggrandizement, she later shows signs of a last-minute regret which, nevertheless, does not save her. Jodey Castricano underlines how Eleanor's hesitation sets two main questions. On the one hand, if the suicide is taken as cause of Eleanor's death, the reader is left with the question regarding the actual reason behind her choice. On the other hand, Eleanor's final doubt on the reason behind her gesture may suggest the presence of a second, mysterious consciousness that may have led Eleanor to her death (2006: 1). If this second consciousness is identified with Hill House or with what haunts it, the influence of the house over Eleanor's state of mind can be

compared with the effect of the house of Usher over Poe's narrator, who "felt that I breathed an atmosphere of sorrow. An air of stern, deep, and irredeemable gloom hung over and pervaded all" ("House of Usher": 142).

1.2.2. J. Sheridan Le Fanu, "An Account of Some Strange Disturbances in Aungier Street" (1853)

As they reside in a house purchased by the narrator's uncle, frightening apparitions begin to disturb the nights of the narrator and of his cousin. While alone in the house due to the temporary departure of his cousin, the protagonist experiences a series of ghastly appearances. Although the setting and the general atmosphere of the narration produce a certain grade of uneasiness, the horrific power of the haunting presence decreases when the reader is made aware of the conspicuous drinking habits of the narrator, who then falls in the narratological category of the unreliable narrator. Moreover, although the story supplies some gruesome descriptions, the story is characterised by a certain level of parody in describing the narrator's continuous allusions to alcohol and his reactions at the sight of the apparitions. In its description of the house as very old and surrounded by a mysterious and melancholic atmosphere, Le Fanu's story resembles Poe's account of the house of Usher and reinforces the stereotypical characteristics of the haunted house. Nonetheless, if the house in Poe's story can be considered as a partial representation of a haunted mansion since the source of horror is a premature burial and not a ghost, Le Fanu completely conforms to the canon by depicting both the haunted house and the haunting presence. Even though Le Fanu's story does not provide remarkable examples of innovations in the ghost story genre, its importance as model from the tradition is reinforced when the issue of the unreliable narrator who is involved in supernatural occurrences is taken into consideration.

Chapter 2: Hans Robert Jauss' "horizon of expectations"

As already explained in the "Introduction," the analysis of the two novels is supported by the theory of the "horizon of expectations" as formulated by the German academic Hans Robert Jauss (1921–1997), member of the Konstanz school of literary studies. Jauss' theory is included in the methodology called *Rezeptionsästhetik*, which is translated as reader-response criticism (De Man, 1982: viii). Jauss adopted an historical approach to the analysis of the response of

readers by using the concept of "paradigm" as "the scientific framework of concepts and assumptions operating in a particular period" (Selden, Widdowson & Brooker, 2016: 39). By linking historical and literary perspectives, Jauss identifies "the criteria readers use to judge literary texts in any given period" (40) as the "horizon of expectations." Thus, each historical period during which a literary text was produced or acknowledged implies the existence of an "horizon of expectations" which differs from the previous or the following period. In this sense, the changing nature of the "horizon" as set of criteria is a paradigm of the equally changing approach of readers from the point of view of literary criticism, thus producing questions on, for example, the placement of a text in a particular genre. Moreover, by adopting a hermeneutical approach, the original "horizon of expectations," namely the criteria used at the time of the production of the text, does not determine the final meaning of the text (40). The everchanging nature of the reception of a text in Jauss' theory sets the problem of identifying an authority that can establish the value of a text, to which Jauss replies by adopting the approach of Hans-Georg Gadamer. Gadamer supported the dialogic nature of the relationship between past and present when approaching a literary text from the past, thus applying to the texts the questions that arise from our perspective as modern readers (2008: 38–39). Consequently, understanding a text implies a conciliation of past and present which shows how it is impossible to "make our journey into the past without taking the present with us" (Selden, Widdowson & Brooker, 2016: 41).

The two novels taken into consideration in this thesis are approached by following the entwined relationship of past and present, as explained by Jauss and Gadamer. When describing the "horizon of expectations" and, more generally, the approach to a text, it was particularly clear how both academics placed noteworthy importance not only on the development of literary criticism through the decades, but also on the historical background and on the set of values that led society at the moment of the publication of the text. In this sense, the analysis of the novels moves from the dialogue between the "horizon of expectations" of the moment of publication and the "horizon" from which the contemporary reader looks at the text. It is thus argued that the variations in the sets of values of the two "horizons" will bring to a consequent variation in the reception of the device of the ghost. This variation justifies the need to provide a background both on the literary tradition of ghosts and on the societal response to the topics treated in the novels at the time of their publication. As already underlined, *The Haunting of Hill House* is the novel that relies on socio-historical distancing and that best reflects what has just been explained regarding the traditional application of Jauss' theory. Through historical

distancing, contemporary readers can investigate the use of device of ghosts in an objective way, without being influenced by those same societal factors that influenced readers at the time of publication. The contemporary objective perspective also increases the chances of identifying traces of social criticism which were overlooked at the time of publication.

Thus, in the case of *The Haunting of Hill House*, background knowledge on the approach to mental health in the American 1950s will provide the tools to understand if the presence of references to mental illness was overlooked due to the potential stigma linked with the topic. As for the *The Hundred Secret Senses*, Tan's novel may appear not totally suitable to be analysed according to the "horizon of expectations" due to the relatively close date of publication, 1995. Since the novel focuses on the formation of identity of a Chinese-American woman, the study of the issue of the development of identity may benefit from 21st century scholarly studies that managed to approach the topic by embracing its development across the entire 20th century. Still, the main interesting element in Tan's novel is probably the lack of awareness that the contemporary reader may have when dealing with references to aspects of Chinese culture which influenced the characterisation of ghosts in the novel. In this sense, the crucial factor for the attribution of a deeper analysis of the ghosts in Tan's novel may come from a shortage of cultural knowledge rather than from a lack of socio-historical background on the topic. Nonetheless, the chapter on *The Hundred Secret Senses* provides information on both topics to support the interpretation of the ghosts in the novel as solidly as possible.

Chapter 3: *The Haunting of Hill House* by Shirley Jackson

3.1. Author's biography

Shirley Hardie Jackson was born in San Francisco, California, in 1919. Considering the important role of houses in Jackson's production as in, for example, *We Have Always Lived in the Castle* and *The Haunting of Hill House*, it is a coincidence that being an architect was a popular profession in her maternal grandfather's lineage (Franklin, 2017: 13). She had a difficult relationship with her mother Geraldine, whose influence was later portrayed in her novels by depicting protagonists, who either are motherless or who struggle in building a healthy relationship with their mother (25). She started writing short stories at a very young age, but she had to wait until the late 1930s, during her university years at Syracuse University,

to see one of her short stories published in the university magazine. She graduated in 1940 and then married Stanley Edgar Hyman, who later became a literary critic (Bloom, 2001: 11). In 1948 she published her first novel, *The Road through the Wall*, and seven stories, including probably her most famous one, "The Lottery." The short story was then included in the collection *The Lottery, or the Adventures of James Harris*, published in 1949. Two years later, her second and, according to Franklin, most autobiographical novel, *Hangsaman*, was published. Between 1953 and 1957 she published two family chronicles, *Life among the Savages* and *Raising Demons*, whereas the novel *The Bird's Nest* was published in 1954 and was positively received by critics. Between 1959 and 1962 she published her two most famous novels, *The Haunting of Hill House* and *We Have Always Lived in the Castle* (12). *The Haunting of Hill House* received both financial and critical positive responses. Critics either classified the novel as one of the most scary ghost stories ever read, or they judged it having a too explicit Freudian inspiration. Still, most critics recognised Jackson's will to address "the haunted mind" (Franklin, 2017: 424). *We Have Always Lived in the Castle* received equal approval from the critics, who defined the novel as Jackson's masterpiece (451). She died of heart failure on August 8, 1965. Stanley Hyman edited two posthumous works, *The Magic of Shirley Jackson* (1966) and *Come Along With Me* (1968) (Bloom, 2001: 13).

3.2. Synopsis

The novel opens with the presentation of one of the main characters of the story, Dr. Montague. He is preparing a project to find evidences of supernatural forces in Hill House. To do so, he selects a number of people who experienced supernatural events. One of them is Eleanor Vance, the protagonist of the novel and the person around whom rotates the central question on the ambiguity of the presence that haunts Hill House. It is clear from the very first pages that Eleanor suffers from a troubled past of social isolation due to the years she spent with her invalid mother to the extent that "[s]he could not remember ever being truly happy in her adult life" (*The Haunting of Hill House*, 6). She also has difficulties in talking to people without feeling awkward and self-conscious. This also brought her to the development of a childish attitude towards love, which is manifest in her daydreaming about romantic adventures. The other female character who takes part in the experiment is Theodora, a lively young woman who is the opposite of Eleanor and whose world "was one of delight and soft colors" (*Hill House*, 8). The fourth participant is Luke Sanderson, the heir of Hill House.

After their arrival, they hear from Dr. Montague the gruesome past events linked with Hill House, which procured the mansion the reputation of being haunted. They start the exploration of the house the following morning and they are made aware of the unusual architecture of the house, which causes bewilderment and a sense of uneasiness. They find the first sign of anomaly in an extremely cold spot located in the doorway of the nursery. That night, Eleanor and Theodora live a frightful experience when a mysterious presence starts banging violently on their bedroom door, trying to enter the room. Puzzlingly, Luke and Dr. Montague do not hear any sound. The next morning they find a message written in chalk in the hallway, "Help Eleanor come home." The occurrence leaves Eleanor terrified and ignites the first fight between her and Theodora, thus deteriorating their relationship. The following day, as the anomalies become more and more frequent, Theodora finds her clothes scattered all over her room and drenched in what seems and smells like blood. Additionally, a second message that reads "Help Eleanor come home Eleanor" is on one of the walls. At the same time, Eleanor's paranoia increases as she feels that Theodora is becoming increasingly hostile towards her. While the initial serenity among the four main characters vacillates, Eleanor and Theodora encounter a ghastly family who is having a picnic in the wood behind Hill House.

The arrival of Dr. Montague's authoritative wife seems to break the unsettling atmosphere of the house. While she conducts various experiments to communicate with the haunting presence, Eleanor is again addressed in the messages that are intercepted. At the same time, Eleanor's traumatised personality manifests again when she tells Theodora that she will follow her home after the experience at Hill House is over. When Theodora asks her if she always goes where she is not wanted, Eleanor placidly replies that "I've never been wanted *anywhere*" (*Hill House*, 209), thus showing her pathological need to be accepted by other people. Eleanor's troubled mind is displayed once again when she starts running around Hill House at night, as if possessed. It is suggested that the presence which banged on the doors few nights before was a sort of projection of Eleanor's paranoia and social anxiety. She is finally rescued by Luke, but the episode convinces Dr. Montague that Eleanor needs to leave the house for her safety. Eleanor has now completely gone insane and she is obliged by Dr. Montague to drive away from Hill House. Nonetheless, she still professes her unnatural attachment to the mansion which she now thinks belongs to her. Finally, she dies by crashing her car into a tree. Even though her thoughts seem to suggest suicide, her thinking "*Why* am I doing this?" just before the impact makes readers question the effective suicidal nature of her death.

3.3. Inside the haunted house

Jackson's *The Haunting of Hill House* is the author's iconic contribution to the horror subgenre of the haunted house narrative. Before focusing on the novel itself, a background description of the nature of the haunted house narrative is necessary.

Steven Mariconda gives the synthetic definition of haunted house as "a dwelling that is inhabited by or visited regularly by a ghost or other supposedly supernatural being" (2007: 268) and underlines that "as long as human beings have a home, the haunted house will continue to exist" (268). It may be correct to state that the feeling of horror caused by a haunted house story derives from the denial of the meaning of house itself as synonym of solidity and shelter. Since the collapse of the house as archetype of safety is needed for the horror to arise, it could be affirmed that the haunted house genre needs human beings to keep on existing, as it plays with the primitive fear of losing one's refuge. The corruption of such an archetype is usually rendered in a visual way when haunted houses are "described as having a particular material presence and an atmosphere which sets them apart from their surroundings" (Lipman 2016: 14). Thus, the haunted house can be considered as a deviance of something that we experience every day. The fear that we feel when reading a haunted house story comes from the awareness that what is supposed to be the safe environment by definition has become populated by nightmares. Even if the most famous stories set in haunted houses seem to belong to the 19th and early 20th centuries, the presence of haunted houses in literature is older than one may think. Among the examples from Classical Antiquity, the most known story set in a haunted house may be Plautus´ Mostellaria. Interestingly, one of the first examples of haunted house is found in a comic play that uses the stratagem of the haunting to create hilarious situations. Such example is diametrically opposed to the traditional modern idea of haunted house stories, in which the narration wants to arise fear rather than laughter.

If we then make a temporal sprint into the 18th century, we meet the first example of the haunted castle in Horace Walpole´s *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), which traditionally marks the birth of Gothic fiction. Stories about haunted houses can be found in the production of, among others, Edgar Allan Poe ("The Fall of the House of Usher," 1839) and J. Sheridan Le Fanu (Miraconda 2007: 269–271). While investigating the form of the haunted house in the American imagination, Sarah Burns identifies one of the possible reasons behind the switch of the Victorian mansion from being "the material symbol of affluence, elegance, and taste" to "a signifier of terror, death, and decay" (2012: 3) in its typical architecture that "promised inner

spaces equally eccentric and complex, equally disconcerting" (10). Thus, the architectural complexity of the Victorian mansion and its consequent abundancy of hidden spaces and dark corners may ignite the same distress that brought to the creation of the archetype of the haunted house as corrupted shelter. Moreover, in the American architectural landscape of the early 20th century, "Victorian" was a derogatory word used to identify styles other than the federal, colonial, and Greek classicism revival (4). The popular belief that identifies Victorian mansions as haunted can also be explained by the link between the house itself and death. In its being used during funerals, the American Victorian mansion mirrors its English counterpart since, in both cases, the parlour or the dining room used to be the rooms where the coffin was placed for mourning (10–11). Judith Flanders reports the case of a Victorian family whose deceased member was left in the parents' room, where he had died. Plaster casts and photographs of him were taken and the coffin was then brought in the dining room, where it remained for six days until the funeral (2004: 332). It is unsurprising, then, that the Victorian mansion seems to be the perfect model for the haunted house.

An analysis of the reception of mental illness in the American 1950s will now be provided. Subsequently, Jauss' theory will be applied while considering the difference between the initial and the present reception of the text. Given the better understanding of, research in, and interest for, the topic of mental illness in contemporary society, it is argued that the topic of mental illness in *The Haunting of Hill House* suffered from the effects of social stigmatisation at the time of publication, whereas it received renewed and accurate attention in recent years.

3.4. Reception of mental illnesses in the American 1950s

Literary critic Stanley Edgar Hyman, Jackson's husband, explicitly addressed the wrong reception of Jackson's literary work. Hyman suggests that her "visions of dissociation and madness, of alienation and withdrawal, of cruelty and terror, have been taken to be personal, even neurotic fantasies" when they actually are "fitting symbols of our distressing world of the concentration camp and the Bomb" (1966: viii). Jackson's characters are not only symbols of the paranoia deriving from such traumatic historical events, but they also reflect intimate struggles and social uneasiness that give rise to mental illness (Hague 2005: 74). Thus, in *The Haunting of Hill House* the characters' inability to identify and consequently approach Eleanor's mental struggles reflects the same inability of mid-century American society to treat its mentally ill citizens. The lack of acknowledgement of mental illness or its superficial

identification as such may have caused readers' failure in recognising the paranormal presences in Hill House as linked with Eleanor's state of mind. An example of such failure can be found behind the simplistic labelling of the novel as a Freudian ghost story, a definition suggested by 1960s critics. The novel itself is a manifestation of the set of concepts and beliefs that constitute the societal "horizon of expectations" towards mental illnesses at the time of the publication of the novel. In this sense, the ability of the contemporary reader to recognise traces of social stigma[1] in the characters' attitude towards Eleanor is the result of an increased awareness on the topic. This awareness can be translated into the set of beliefs that Jauss identifies as the basis for a new "horizon of expectations" which is in contraposition with the "horizon" adopted by readers in the 1960s. In this context, social stigma plays a fundamental role in the relationship between society and mentally ill people. The following analyses focuses on the situation of the social stigma attributed to mental illnesses by American society during the 1950s.

By 1952, the analysis of 3,500 interviews to American citizens showed a worryingly high level of confusion and prejudice regarding the topic of mental illness. The main characteristics associated with mentally ill people were "unpredictability, impulsiveness, loss of control, extreme irrationality, and legal incompetence" (Star 1952: 2–3). Moreover, the identification of mental illness as such relied on three main factors. First, a person was defined as mentally ill when their mental functions deviated from the norm, meaning that an intellectual breakdown was observed. Second, the breakdown would lead to a dangerous loss of self-control. Last, the person's behaviour was judged "ill" once it was unreasonable and unexpected considering the social situation (Star 1955: 5). The public identified rationality and self-control as the grounding characteristics of a "sane" person. Consequently, there was the tendency to underestimate behaviours linked with mental health as long as rational reasons behind such behaviours could be found in the person's past and in the present circumstances in which the person was. Star's 1955 study suggests that "mental illness is something that people want to keep as far from themselves as possible" since "it represents to people loss of what they consider to be the distinctively human qualities of rationality and free will" (6). The stigma towards mentally ill people in America at the time is also highlighted by the behaviour of people towards individuals with a past of mental illness. 60 percent of the interviewees affirmed that they would feel disquiet and even fear in dealing with a former mentally ill person should they be aware of his

[1] "Stigma" is defined as "a combination of stereotyped beliefs […] and discriminatory behaviours toward outgroups […] resulting in reduced life opportunities for those who are devalued" (Hinshaw and Stier 2008: 368).

or her clinic past (7). This public stigma involved not only mentally ill individuals, but also the experts who had to treat them. The stigma was the discouraging result of the failure of the experts' efforts to educate the population and to fight prejudices regarding the topic. Moreover, the fear of stigmatisation had the serious consequence of preventing people from seeking treatment (Phelan et al. 2000: 189). The ambivalent nature of the attitude towards mental illness is highlighted also by Derek L. Phillips, who underlines the duality that comes from the public's ability to identify some behaviours as symptoms of mental issues. On the one hand, this identification would ideally bring to the will of including mentally ill patients in society by offering adequate treatments. On the other hand, the identification of these symptoms may lead to an even worse exclusion of the person due to prejudices and, again, social stigma (Phillips 1966: 757). It is thus evident how social stigma plays a fundamental role in the attitude towards individuals with mental illness and how such stigma could eventually lead to the refusal of accepting evident symptoms of mental illness. It is also evident that the decrease of social stigma is inversely proportional to the positive attitude towards mental health issues. It is right this relationship between the decrease of stigma and the increase of positive attitude that creates the set of behaviour that distinguish between the two "horizons of expectations."

Although the number and quality of scholarly studies on the stigma over mental illness had increased by the 1980s, results showed a similar pattern in the popular attitude towards the topic if compared with the 1950s and 1960s (Hinshaw and Cicchetti 2000: 559). The contemporary approach to the topic of mental health seems to differ consistently from what has just been illustrated. The main index of this change is the higher number of people who willingly seek support from mental health treatments. This tendency suggests the consequent change in the view of mental illness as something to be ostracised and the decrease of social stigma linked with this condition (Phelan et al. 2000: 189). Nonetheless, it must be highlighted how popular media in some cases reinforced this social stigma through depictions of stereotyped depictions of mentally ill patients, especially during the 1990s (Hinshaw and Cicchetti 2000: 557). Although the complete eradication of the social stigma linked with mental illness has not been reached yet, recent years have seen a progressive increase of awareness which involved both professional and popular discourses. Current implementations of top-down and bottom-up strategies addressing mental health contribute to the normalisation of the popular view on the topic, thus cyclically strengthening the process of normalisation itself. The presence of contemporary bottom-up behaviours involving citizens in the fight against social stigma can thus be considered as the fundamental difference separating the approach of 1950s and 1960s

readers and of contemporary readers when approaching *The Haunting of Hill House*. That is, the progressive normalisation of the discourse on mental illness and the involvement of contemporary readers in such discourse allow them to identify those issues that past readers overlooked due to a lack of social and personal engagement.

3.5. Ghosts of the mind

The following analysis of *The Haunting of Hill House* aims at studying the way in which the characters behave towards the protagonist's signs of mental illness by making a comparison with the tendency of social stigma as presented by Star. In particular, it is argued that the identification of these behaviours as mirroring such stigma is possible only by adopting a "horizon of expectations" which differs from the one adopted by readers and critics who approached the novel at Jackson's time. A better identification of the social stigma in the novel derives from the possibility for contemporary readers of historically distancing themselves from the social situation. Thus, a comparison between the past and the present approach to the topic and the awareness of the characteristics of the social stigma during the 1950s help contemporary readers in the identification of Jackson's allusions to mental illness through the novel. This argument does not ignore the fact that some literary critics identified issues linked with mental health in Jackson's novel already at the time of publication. Still, this analysis approaches the topic from a different angle, as it argues that such identification is encouraged and reinforced in a contemporary reading of the novel by a highest degree of awareness on the topic of mental illness and by a different social consideration of the topic. Moreover, this approach can be applied both by academics and, on a more popular level, by single readers. This is due to the fact that, in both cases, the different socio-historical moment determines the possibility of identifying behaviours of social stigmatisation that were considered normal at the time of publication, as they were part of the set of norms that formed the "horizon of expectations".

Readers approaching Jackson's novel would probably detect a tendency to personify Hill House. The first page of the book ascribes to Hill House a degree of independent will in its staying "by itself against its hills, holding darkness within" (*Hill House,* 3). This perception is reinforced when Eleanor, the protagonist, finds herself staring at the façade of the house for the first time. She immediately thinks that "[t]he house was vile. She shivered and thought, […] Hill House is vile, it is diseased; get away from here at once" (*HH,* 33). The description of the architectural features of Hill House strengthen such first impression, as "the face of Hill House

seemed awake, with a watchfulness from the blank windows and a touch of glee in the eyebrow of a cornice" (*HH*, 34). The personification of Hill House and the resemblance of its façade to a human face mirror Poe's description of the house in his short story "The Fall of the House of Usher." Thus, if the death of Roderick Usher corresponds with the physical destruction of the house, Eleanor's identification with Hill House corresponds with the progressive corruption of her mind. In both cases, the house is a *doppelgänger* of the human being. In this sense, it is worth noticing that by entering the house which resembles a human face, the characters of both narratives are metaphorically entering the human mind. Moreover, the boundary between the house and the characters seems to be somehow linked with the property of the house itself. If the identification of the house and of the Usher siblings is evident, as they are the legal owners of the building, the situation is different when it comes to Eleanor and Hill House. Technically speaking, Hill House belongs to the aunt of one of the characters, Luke Sanderson. Thus, Luke is the legitimate heir of the mansion. Still, it is made evident through the book that Luke considers Hill House as a burden which he profanes by repeatedly stealing some of the valuable objects which belong to his aunt. On the contrary, Eleanor becomes so obsessed with Hill House and she identifies with the house so much that, in the end, she self-proclaims herself as its owner.

The above-mentioned characteristics regarding the anthropomorphic representation of Hill House and its link with Eleanor, which is progressively strengthened through the narration, tend to converge the readers' attention to the supernatural element of the story. This is why the following analysis focuses on the identification of Eleanor's behaviours ascribable to mental health issues without taking into consideration the supernatural aspect of the narrative *per se*. Instead, the reaction of the other characters to Eleanor's behaviours is the focus of the analysis. The aim is to identify a parallelism between the behaviour of the characters and the social stigmatisation path which was a side of the American society in the 1950s and which influenced the approach to the topic during the 1960s, as explained in the beginning of the present subchapter.

Eleanor's troubled mental health is evident from her very first description. Jackson writes that Eleanor "could not remember ever being truly happy in her adult life" (*HH*, 6). This is mainly due to her difficult domestic situation. After having assisted her invalid mother for eleven years, Eleanor's only family boundaries are her sister and her brother-in-law, who treat her as a burden. Due to her being alone in a hostile world, she develops difficulties in having a conversation with others "without self-consciousness and an awkward inability to find words"

(*HH*, 7). Examples of this deep discomfort emerge through the whole novel. For example, she is constantly scared that the other characters may make fun of her or that they may perceive that she is grateful for receiving their attentions. In this sense, she has recurring obsessive thoughts, like "[w]hat did I do; did I make a fool of myself? Where they laughing at me?" (*HH*, 94) and "[t]oday I will be more reserved, less openly grateful to all of them for having me" (*HH*, 94). She also shows a profound need to belong to a group and to feel accepted and wanted by others. This becomes explicit when, during one of the first evenings spent with the other characters at Hill House, she feels that she finally "belongs, […] is talking easily, […] is sitting by the fire with her friends" (*HH*, 61). She is unable to recognise that she is sitting among strangers who do not feel any kind of bond with her. The fact that she identifies them as friends and that she acts as if she has finally found her place in the world show her desperate need to build some kind of positive human relationship, as mentioned above.

These social difficulties emerge also in Eleanor's attitude towards the opposite sex. Through the book, she displays childlike fantasies regarding meeting a man. For example, she expresses her desire to meet "a devilishly handsome smuggler" (*HH*, 32) and, while exploring the surroundings of Hill House, she says that the stream of water that she and Theodora find behind the house is "where the princess comes to meet the magic golden fish who is really a prince in disguise" (*HH*, 52). Despite her being thirty-two, Eleanor seems to lack the social confidence to approach the idea of love in a mature way. Hattenhauer conveniently summarises this attitude by defining Eleanor as a *puer aeternus*, an eternal child (2003: 157). As the narration develops, Eleanor seems to nourish a certain attraction for Luke Sanders, the legitimate heir of Hill House. Nonetheless, this becomes an additional source of anxiety for her, since Luke does not reflect the fairy-like characteristics of the ideal men she dreams about. She feels increasingly frustrated and becomes more and more paranoid when she notices that Luke shows interest for the flirtatious and confident Theodora. Although lack of maturity in the relationship with the opposite sex is not an indicator of mental illness, her insecurities which are displayed also by this behaviour increasingly worsen through the book and they become contributing factors to the collapse of her mental stability.

After having delineated the mental health situation of the protagonist, it is now interesting to focus on the attitude of the other characters towards Eleanor. Starr's 1955 study located one of the most common fears linked with mental health in the loss of rationality and self-control, which were considered some of the grounding characteristics of the human being. In this sense the first character, Dr. John Montague, embodies such belief and the consequent attempt to

deny and ostracise mental illness. His dealing with the supernatural aims at gaining acknowledgement among the scientific community. Thus, his will to subjugate the supernatural to the scientific method reflects the will of the community to overcome the fear of mental illness by recurring to an extreme dose of rationality. While planning his experiment in Hill House, Dr. Montague wants to follow "the methods of the intrepid nineteenth-century ghost hunters" (*HH*, 4). As highlighted in the "The evolution of ghosts" section, ghost hunters from the 19th century embodied the implicit Victorian contradiction of trying to prove the existence of the supernatural through the scientific method. Thus, Dr. Montague becomes the 1950s counterparts of the Victorian ghost hunters.

Through the book, Dr. Montague is divided between a degree of belief in the paranormal activities and the indestructible desire to defend his rational background by approaching the phenomena in a scientific way. Two episodes explicitly display this attitude. While exploring the house, the characters notice a disequilibrium in the architecture of the house, resulting in a feeling of unbalance and bewilderment. Luke argues that this could be the real reason behind the supernatural phenomena. Dr. Montague consequently answers that "[w]e have grown to trust blindly in our sense of balance and reason, and I can see where the mind might fight wildly to preserve its own familiar stable patterns" (*HH*, 107). As the mind tries to eliminate the supernatural, so people distance themselves from mental illness to preserve their sense of rationality. Nonetheless, it is during the second episode that Dr. Montague most clearly professes his faith in the rational mind. After one violent supernatural phenomenon, the Doctor says that

> No ghost in all the long histories of ghosts has ever hurt anyone physically. The only damage done is by the victim to himself. One cannot even say that the ghost attacks the mind, because the mind, the conscious, thinking mind, is invulnerable; in all our conscious minds, […], there is not one iota of belief in ghosts. (*HH*, 139–140)

Once again, Dr. Montague shows an unshakable faith in the power of the rational mind. In his apologia of human rationality, he diminishes the role of ghosts by implying that the conscious mind is so strong that it is able to overcome any kind of threat, both physical and supernatural. Hattenhauer argues that Montague's attitude towards the irrational is actually caused by a fear of irrationality itself (2003: 156). Such theory explains the Doctor's attempts to analyse any supernatural event by following a logical scheme. Montague's fear also explains his attitude towards Eleanor at the end of the novel. Despite Eleanor's plea to let her stay in Hill House, he is unmovable and completely blind in front of the protagonist's final descent into madness, which springs in her death (156). His rigidity reflects his fear of having to face Eleanor's state

of mind should he decide to let her stay in Hill House. He hides his fear of irrationality by professing his will to protect Eleanor, not seeing that he makes her more harm than good. By identifying fear behind the doctor's behaviour, Hattenhauer reinforces the parallelism between Montague and the American society concerning the battle against mental illness through rationality. Both Dr. Montague and society resort to rationality to hide their fear of the supernatural and mental illness, respectively.

Although the examination above focused on Dr. Montague's rational approach to the supernatural, he is also involved in the other main point of this analysis, namely the characters' attitude towards Eleanor. Dr. Montague, Luke and Theodora represent the side of social stigma that tended to ostracise mental illness as a threat to the superficial coat of carefreeness and happiness that was the aim of American society during the 1950s and 1960s, especially after the experience of Second World War and of the atomic bomb. Such carefreeness is strongly embodied by the character of Theodora. She is "not at all like Eleanor. Duty and conscience were, […], attributes which belonged properly to Girl Scouts" (*HH*, 8). Theodora's lack of values is reflected by her hypocritical attitude towards Eleanor, who at first thinks of having finally created a genuine bond of friendship with Theodora. As the fake nature of Theodora's attitude becomes progressively manifested, Eleanor's state of mind exacerbates and the protagonist develops violent thoughts against her. This violent drift is the result of ostracising behaviours coming mainly from Theodora but also involving Dr. Montague and Luke. Theodora's role in such process is determined by her fake friendly attitude which is interpreted by the protagonist as pure friendship. Eleanor's complex of inferiority towards Theodora and her desperate need to maintain a degree of affinity with the other woman is demonstrated by the protagonist's attempt to adapt to Theodora's cheerful and superficial behaviour. Nonetheless, as already highlighted, Eleanor is completely the opposite of Theodora and this attempt to conform to Theodora's personality has the only effect of distressing the protagonist. Moreover, after having realised Theodora's insincerity, Eleanor sinks even more in her depression as she understands that her attempt to change her own personality is not enough to be accepted by Theodora and by the other characters. This painful realisation finds a concrete equivalent in some episodes that explicitly show the incapability or unwillingness of the other characters to identify Eleanor's signs of mental illness, which result in them blaming and ostracising the protagonist. Although Eleanor's exclusion is the result of a process that expands through the whole book, the most evident examples will be given to highlight the existing parallelism with the societal stigma towards mental illness.

The two most explicit episodes that display Eleanor being ostracised are performed by Theodora. The first one involves a supernatural occurrence which sparks recriminations between Eleanor and Theodora and which highlights the tension that lurks in the background of their relationship. After a writing that addresses Eleanor appears on one of the walls of the house, a smiley Theodora suggests to a terrified Eleanor that "[m]aybe you wrote it yourself" (*HH*, 147), thus making manifest her lack of empathy and her infancy by taking the delicate episode as a way to highlight personal grudge. Theodora's attitude becomes borderline bullying when she suggests that the spirits may have contacted Eleanor because they were "only waiting for some drab, timid---" (*HH*, 147), thus trying to ostracise Eleanor by pressing on her insecurities. If the evident differences between Eleanor and Theodora's personalities are taken into account, the reason behind Theodora's attack is manifest. Theodora is aware that her behavioural attitude perfectly conforms with social standard. She also knows that Eleanor's situation is completely the opposite, as she is considered an outsider. By highlighting Eleanor's insecurities and her need to be noticed by others, Theodora tries to increase the existing discrepancy in order to purge the situation from the influence of Eleanor who is now fully considered the misfit of the group. By doing so, Theodora incarnates the will to distance mentally ill people to avoid them from disrupting the apparently perfect balance of a rational society. At the same time, the issue of blame and guilt becomes manifest. Theodora tries to make Eleanor responsible for what is happening by suggesting that Eleanor's being an outsider is the cause of her own discomfort. Eleanor is the only one to blame and she is not going to receive any help from the other characters. The second episode that indicates how Eleanor is ostracised sees the protagonist asking Theodora to let her come with her to her apartment after the conclusion of their experience in Hill House. Rather than a request, Eleanor communicates her decision of following Theodora. When asked why she wants to go home with Theodora, she replies that she "never had anyone to care about. […] I want to be someplace where I belong" (*HH*, 208). If Eleanor's words are once again exemplification of her profound discomfort, Theodora's reply is an equal proof of her lack of concern regarding Eleanor's situation.

> "I am not in the habit of taking home stray cats," Theodora said lightly. […] "I can get a job; I won't be in your way." "I don't understand." Theodora threw down her pencil in exasperation. "Do you *always* go where you're not wanted?" Eleanor smiled placidly. "I've never been wanted *anywhere*," she said. (*HH*, 208–209)

Two other episodes involving the whole circle of characters strike the reader for the nonchalantly way in which the mechanism of exclusion is performed. The first episode is again

linked with the tendency to identify the mentally ill person as egocentric whenever they express their discomfort. While expressing her fears regarding her being the main target of the spirits of Hill House, Eleanor adopts a sort of stream of consciousness that, after a moment, makes her believe that she "said something silly, from the way you're all staring at me" (*HH*, 161). Readers may easily shudder at the replies of the other characters, who do not show any sign of concern or empathy for Elanor's situation.

> The doctor laughed. "Stop trying to be the center of attention." "Vanity," Luke said serenely. "Have to be in the limelight," Theodora said, and they smiled fondly, all looking at Eleanor. (*HH*, 161)

This attempt to diminish the importance of the person's feelings discloses the inability of people as singles and of society as a whole to deal with the situation. The worst part of the cruel treatment that Eleanor has to endure is right the nonchalance that permeates these episodes. The last example that is taken into account in this analysis is found at the end of the novel, moments before Eleanor kills herself. While a supplicant Eleanor tries to convince Dr. Montague to stay in Hill House, the doctor's pedant wife, recently arrived at Hill House to support her husband's investigation, harshly interrupts Eleanor by both ridiculing her and making her feel guilty for wasting everyone's time (*HH*, 243). Mrs. Montague also adds that she spoke to Eleanor's sister, who first asked about the car that she shares with Eleanor rather than about Eleanor's herself. By highlighting that "[t]he sister was most annoyed at me because they had planned to go off on their vacation today" (*HH*, 240), Mrs. Montague underlines the lack of importance that Eleanor plays in everyone's eyes, including her own sister. This example reiterates the mechanism of exclusion and psychological abuse by blaming the mentally ill person. Most importantly though, the need to contact the sister implies the belief that Eleanor is not able to take care of herself. Star's 1952 study indicates that lack of legal competence was one of the characteristics attributed to mentally ill people by the general public in America (3). By organising Eleanor's return without discussing the details with her, the other characters display the belief that Eleanor needs someone to supervise her life. Still, this creates an implicit contradiction in the behavioural pattern of the characters and it reinforces the mechanism of distancing from and denial of mental illness. In the light of Eleanor's inability to take care of herself, one of the other characters should have gone with her for safety reasons. This is what Mrs. Montague suggests, but Dr. Montague replies that "[i]t would be a mistake to send one of us with her. She must be allowed to forget everything about this house as soon as she can" (*HH*, 240). By reapplying Hattenhauer's theory regarding Dr. Montague's fear of irrationality, it becomes evident that the need to allow Eleanor to forget and to disassociate

herself from Hill House is just an excuse to accelerate the departure of Eleanor, the irrational outsider, from those who fit into society.

Through the book, the above-described behaviours cause Eleanor's retreat in her dark thoughts and this corresponds with an increase in supernatural phenomena. As the haunted mansion responds to Eleanor's struggles, the link between the house and Eleanor's mind increases. The growth of supernatural phenomena tends to be considered as the reason behind the worsening of Eleanor's mental health. In this sense, the house is regarded as a powerful force that influences Eleanor's mind. Quite the opposite, it is here argued that the paranormal events are the manifested consequences of Eleanor's mental illness. By switching the roles that determine the development of the chain of events in Hill House, the focus is no longer on the ghosts that haunt the mansion, but on Eleanor and on her mental condition. Thus, the elements that make *The Haunting of Hill House* a traditional ghost story lose their centrality. This allows readers to identify Jackson's use of the device of ghosts and her adherence to the haunted house narrative as a shell that conceal the deeper discourse on mental illness.

The novel ends with Eleanor's death, crushed under the pressure imposed by the rational minds of the other characters. Thus, Eleanor's death is the emblem of the character's failure to recognise her uneasiness and to support her. On a wider level, it signifies the failure of a society which isolates and excludes while trying to ignore the consequences that such lack of support has on people struggling with mental health. In this sense, the incipit of the novel sounds as a premonition. Only at the end of the novel can readers fully recognise the truth behind the fact that "[n]o live organism can continue for long to exist sanely under conditions of absolute reality" (*HH*, 3).

Chapter 4: *The Hundred Secret Senses* by Amy Tan

The ghosts in Amy Tan's *The Hundred Secret Senses* are distant from the model of the Victorian ghost stories. The protagonist's sister, Kwan, who claims to see the inhabitants of the afterlife thanks to her Yin eyes, treats the ghosts as friends rather than as scary shadows. Not only are ghosts wise advisors to the protagonist, Olivia, and to Kwan herself, but they also create the main comical situations in the book. It is thus evident how Tan distances herself from the Victorian model and overturns the stereotyped characteristics of ghosts. If *The Haunting of Hill House* focused on the theme of mental health, *The Hundred Secret Senses* takes into

consideration the protagonist's struggles to find a balance in her origins and to fully define her identity as half American and half Chinese. All in all, Tan's book can be defined as the protagonist's rediscovery of her Chinese origins both through a physical and spiritual journey. Despite a narrative style which could appear less demanding if compared with Jackson novel, *The Hundred Secret Senses* does not fail to address a central topic in the contemporary age of migration. While highlighting the usually underestimated cultural richness that derives from a differentiated heritage, Tan's efficiently shows the obstacles in finding one's own identity when their roots belong to more than one country.

Since Tan's ghosts are shaped according to the Chinese cultural prospect on the topic, the author's biographical section is followed by an account of the Chinese approach to death and of the Chinese literary tradition linked with ghosts. This helps in a better understanding of the characteristics of the spirits in Tan's novel. Moreover, this chapter includes an insight into the process of the formation of the identity in Chinese Americans who belong to the second generation and of those who have a mixed background. The situation of first-generation immigrants in the U.S. is also taken into account to highlight the similarities and differences between the two generations in relation with their attitude towards China and the U.S.

4.1. Author's biography

An-mei Ruth Tan was born in Oakland in 1952. Her mother, Daisy Du Ching, had left China in 1949, leaving behind three daughters and her abusive husband to move to America and marry John Yuehhan Tan, Amy Tan's father (Snodgrass 2004: 7–8). Amy Tan faced the struggles of trying to conciliate her Chinese background and her experiencing everyday life as a California-born teenager. Due to her lack of boundaries with her parents' home country, she totally identified with the American culture (Huntley 1998: 2). At the age of fifteen, Tan lost both her father and older brother to cancer. Her mother turned to her Chinese religious beliefs to find solace and Tan quotes this occasion as the starting point for her being introduced to Chinese culture, which would rather have a central role in her works. At the end of the 1960s, Tan's mother brought the family to Europe and they eventually settled in Switzerland (5).They returned to the U.S. in 1969 and Tan started her doctorate at the University of California Santa Cruz and Berkley, although she did not complete it (6–7). In 1987 she enrolled in a writing workshop which marked the start of her career as a creative writer. She visited China for the first time in October and she met her three half-sisters. This experience inspired her for the

conclusive chapter of *The Joy Book Club*, published in 1989 (Snodgrass 2004: 16). The novel, which focuses on the cultural clash between three Chinese mothers and four second-generation daughters, became an immediate bestseller among both stark criticism towards what was defined as a "dumbed-down Orientalism suited for Caucasian readers" and praises for the representation of the diversified experience of women with Asian background (17). Inspired by the lives of her grandmother Jingmei, who committed suicide in 1925, and of her mother Daisy, Tan wrote *The Kitchen God's Wife* in 1991. Between 1992 and 1994 she published two children's books, *The Moon Lady* and *The Chinese Siamese Cat*. In October 1995 she published *The Hundred Secret Senses* and she included autobiographical elements in the plot by describing the relationship between the Chinese American protagonist and her Chinese sister. Her description of China received new criticism. Still, the novel became a bestseller (20–22). Tan's mother died from Alzheimer in November 1999. The following year, Tan published *The Bonesetter's Daughter*, a novel inspired by her mother's life. She was diagnosed with Lyme disease in 2001. Between 2001 and 2017 she published the novels *Saving Fish from Drowning* (2005) and *The Valley of Amazement* (2013) and the memoirs *The Opposite of Fate* (2003) and *Where the Past Begins: A Writer's Memoir* (2017). According to the author's official website, she has been working on a new novel, *The Memory of Desire*, since 2017.

4.2. Synopsis

"My sister Kwan believes she has yin eyes. She sees those who have died and now dwell in the World of Yin, ghosts who leave the mists just to visit her kitchen on Balboa Street in San Francisco" (*Hundred Secret Senses*, 3). This incipit may already give readers a clue of the kind of ghosts that animate the pages of *The Hundred Secret Senses*. On the one hand, they are ghosts that come from another cultural perspective, from the Chinese World of Yin. On the other hand, by making a spiritual trip between the World of Yin and San Francisco, these ghosts seem to be the bridge between two realities that are apparently poles apart. Before analysing what role these peculiarities may have in the exploration of the formation of the identity of the protagonist, a concise synopsis of the novel is given.

The protagonist, Olivia, is a San Francisco-born daughter of a Chinese immigrant and of an American woman. On his deathbed, her father reveals that he has another daughter in China, in the village of Changmian, and he asks Olivia's mother to take her to the U.S. After Kwan's arrival, Olivia learns Chinese from her, but she is also tormented by the shame of being related

with someone who does not fit American society. Moreover, Olivia learns that Kwan has yin eyes, meaning that she sees ghosts. After a terrified Olivia tells it to her mother, Kwan is sent to a mental hospital, where she receives shock treatments. With a temporal leap, the story sees Olivia now in her thirties, whereas Kwan is in her fifties. They are now both married. Despite Kwan's affectionate and, sometimes, goofy attempts to show her love to Olivia, the protagonist is unable to fully reciprocate. She maintains a rather cold approach, also due to Kwan's continuous references to ghosts that visit her and that give suggestions regarding both her and Olivia's lives. Kwan's eccentricity is increased by the narration of her past life in 1864 during the historical event of the Taiping Rebellion[2] in China. Kwan is convinced that she is the reincarnation of a Chinese girl called Nunumu who creates a strong boundary with a Western woman, Nelly Banner, whose Olivia is supposed to be the reincarnation.

Olivia and Kwan's relationship and Olivia's approach to her identity undergo important changes during their stay in China. While in Changmian, Olivia lives a series of events that make her solve her conflicts with her husband, Simon, and that change her approach towards Kwan. Simultaneously, she starts questioning her scepticism towards Kwan's belief in ghosts. The novel ends with Kwan's disappearance and with Olivia's return to the U.S., where she adopts a Chinese surname and realises the importance of the boundary which links her and Kwan. Finally, she also understands that the "hundred secret senses" which Kwan was able to use so proficiently were not "a language of ghosts," but rather a "language of love" (*Hundred Secret Senses*, 192).

4.3. Ghosts in Chinese tradition

The Chinese view of the world and of the afterlife comes from the merger of the Confucian, Taoist, and Buddhist doctrines during the Chinese classical period (1500 B.C.–A.D. 9). This resulted in the world being considered as the combination of five elements (fire, water, earth, wood, and metal), and as the outcome of the relationship between the *yang*, the bright power that originates things, and the *yin*, the shadowy power that complements the *yang* (Crowder 2003: 673). Among the three doctrines of the classical period, Buddhism focused on the idea

[2] According to T. H. Reilly, the Taiping Rebellion started in 1850 and was suppressed in 1864. The number of victims was around twenty million. The leader of the rebellion, Hung Hsiu-ch'uan, was a Christian converted fanatic who tried to establish the dynasty of the so-called Heavenly Kingdom (*taiping tianguo*), thus threatening the imperial power of the Qing dynasty (2004: 3).
For a detailed study, Reilly, T. H. (2004) *The Taiping Heavenly Kingdom: Rebellion and the Blasphemy of Empire*. Seattle, University of Washington Press.

of reincarnation after death (674). The concepts of *yin* and of reincarnation are particularly important in the perspective of the analysis of *The Hundred Secret Senses*, since the *yin* is portrayed as the force linked with death itself, whereas reincarnation is the fundamental idea which allows the protagonist to fully embrace her Chinese origins.
In Chinese culture, dying means the possibility of becoming either a benevolent ancestor who protects the family, or a vengeful ghost who haunts the living. The discriminating factors are the proper or improper burial of the corpse and the performance of worshipping rituals that must be adequately fulfilled by the living. The complementary elements of *yin* and *yang* return in the concept of the soul as divided in the *hun* (*yang*) and in the *p'o* (*yin*). The *hun* is the side which reaches Heaven and becomes a benevolent ancestor, whereas the *p'o* is trapped on Earth under the form of ghost due to violent death or lack of proper worshipping rituals (675). Robert P. Weller defines ghosts in Chinese culture as "souls who do not occupy the correct position of the dead in the social structure" (1987: 60), thus implying that they do not have "the political standing of the gods" nor "the kinship standing of the ancestors" (60). The importance attributed to rituals performed by the living highlights an important difference with the Western tradition. Since Chinese funerals focus on the nurturance of the soul of the deceased rather than on the alleviation of the pain of the living (Crowder 2003: 685), the Chinese approach to death seems to suggest the belief in the pragmatic continuation of the relationship with the dead. Moreover, due to the conviction that "the living influence the fate of the soul after death and that the dead have consequence in determining the welfare of the living" (685), the Chinese evil spirits tend to wander on earth due to lack of care from the living. This powerful influence on death in Chinese tradition seems to be in contrast with the Western cultural and literary depiction of the origin of troubled ghosts as unrelated with ancestor worship (Emmons 2003: 91).
In considering some examples of traditional Chinese ghost stories, Anthony C. Yu highlights how most of the examples from traditional prose fiction are linked by recurring themes that create three main sub-genres. The "Ghostly Apologue" sub-genre depicts the encounter of the sceptical protagonist and a spirit, thus addressing the debate on the existence of ghosts. Anthony C. Yu reports how ancient sources considered ghosts "as integral phenomena of the natural order" (1987: 403) and thus distant from the traditional idea of the terrifying spirit. He also underlines how these stories assume an informative purpose in depicting the nature of life after death (407). Closer to the traditional Western idea of ghost in the sub-genre of the "Avenging Ghost," the spirit of a victim of human violence as well as of sudden accidents and natural disasters and of those who received improper burial (415). Finally, the "Amorous Ghost" story usually involves two lovers who are able to fulfil their love only if one or both of them die. *The*

Hundred Secret Senses conforms to the "Amorous Ghost" sub-genre in depicting the worries of one of the main characters, Miss Banner, who is worried by the possibility of not meeting her Chinese lover after death due to her Christian faith. As for the extremely vast Chinese literary tradition linked with ghost stories, one of the main collections, the *stories of the anomaly (zhiguai)*, dates back to the period of the Six Dynasties (222–589 A.D.) (Poo 2009: 245). These anomaly stories focus on the disclosure of the origins of the ghosts which would first appear as living beings, only to later reveal their real form, which could range from corpses, animals or inanimate objects, usually linked with nature (246). In contrast, some Taoist texts seem to focus more on the depiction of ghosts as horrific as possible, thus aiming at impressing readers with detailed and gruesome descriptions of the spirits (252).

4.4. To build one's identity

The official website of the European Commission defines a second-generation migrant as "[a] person who was born in and is residing in a country that at least one of their parents previously entered as a migrant." Since it is specified that the term has a sociological validity rather than a legislative one, this definition can be applied also to people living in the U.S despite its being taken from a Europe-related source. The definition marks the existence of two categories that are directly influenced by the phenomenon of immigration, namely the members of first and second generations. If the members of the first generation who moved to a foreign country can be rightly identified as immigrants, the epithet collides with the legislative situation of the second generation in its alluding to a non-existent foreign origin[3]. The problem related with this definition introduces the central topic of this section, namely the formation of the identity of the children of first-generation immigrants. Moreover, it is specified how "second-generation" is usually restricted to children whose both parents were born abroad. Children whose only one parent was born abroad are considered having a mixed background.

Although Tan's protagonist belongs to the mixed background group, as her mother is American and her father is Chinese, the following scholarly articles will take into consideration the experience of all the three categories, namely first-generation Chinese immigrants, members of the second generation, and Chinese Americans with a mixed background. Since the focus of

[3] This issue is highlighted in the footnotes to the definition, which can be found at https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/networks/european_migration_network/glossary_search/second-generation-migrant_en. It is also acknowledged how the term "migrant" is improper, as no migration occurred.

this study is the formation of identity in a multicultural setting, excluding the experience of certain categories due to a mere legislative classification only weakens the narration of the experience itself. Additionally, even if Tan's book revolves around the discovery of the identity of the mixed-background protagonist, the experience of her first-generation sister is equally important, as it exemplifies some of the identity-related mechanisms that involve different generations. Finally, although the scholarly study of the formation of identity in children of immigrants is applicable to any ethnic group, the articles that are quoted below focus on Chinese Americans, as this is the target group represented in *The Hundred Secret Senses*.

4.4.1. Struggles in the experience of first-generation Chinese immigrants

Casado and Leung show how the connection between migration and depression among elderly Chinese immigrants in the U.S. is a result of the stress caused by the immigration process itself, which requires immigrants to confront the adaptation to a new culture and environment and the social isolation that usually derives from leaving one's home-land (2001: 6). In some cases, such an important change of environment as moving to a foreign country could create what may be identified as a crisis in the identity of immigrants. Not only are immigrants expected to conform to the rules of the new working culture but being constantly immerged in a foreign reality surely has important effects on the immigrants' daily habits and on their mindset. In this sense, important help comes from the spontaneous aggregation of immigrants from the same country who thus avoid the eventuality of forgetting their cultural identity and their language. Keeping one's own language alive is one of the most important ways to nourish the immigrants' identity and to avoid the influence of the homeland to disappear completely. Nonetheless, as the article underlines, aggregation is not always possible due to isolation, be it social or physical. In this sense, the results of the potential weakening or loss of immigrants' identity is included among the usually underestimated symbolic losses which, similarly to physical losses, "evoke emotional distress and initiate grieving reactions" (10). The series of losses experienced by immigrants can cause the outbreak of migratory grief, which Casado and Leung found to be the main reason for depression, followed by young age, lower proficiency in English, and frequent visits to the home country (5–6). In particular, the contribution of home visits to the insurgence of depression is linked with the idea of attachment, since "[d]ifficulty in letting go of the things left behind may in turn result in difficulties in adjusting, thus causing psychological distress" (20). The immigrants' psychological and social status is thus heavily influenced by the losses experienced during the immigration process and by the consequent

feeling of grief (11). The testimony of first-generation Chinese immigrants shows how memories of and experiences from one's past linked with the homeland play a fundamental role in the migration grief which contributes to mental health issues. As will be explicated more in details later in this chapter, attachment to the home country and home visits are particularly important in *The Hundred Secret Senses* in the process of the protagonist's discovery of her Chinese roots. If the first-generation immigrants struggle to find a balance between their original identity and the new one to be built in the new country, a second point of view comes from the experience of the second generation. In this sense, there may be a clash of perspective in relation with visits to the family's home country. If first-generation immigrants, as said, may consider their homeland as a place of memories, second generations may rather see it as a brand-new discovery which would help them in becoming fully aware of the cultural roots of their family. Given the vast variety of ways in which the children of first-generation immigrants may build their identity in relation with their families' home country, it is now interesting to take into consideration the experience of Chinese Americans of the second generation.

4.4.2. Second-generation Chinese Americans and identification issues

The second generation meant the possibility for first-generation immigrants to become permanent residents in the U.S. and to increase their opportunities to be involved in the social and political life of the country (Chun 2000: 7). Thus, the second generation seems to incarnate one of the strongest reactions to the difficulties related to the immigration process as introduced by Casado and Leung. In taking into account the ties between the two generations, Chun also highlights the fundamental issue of the formation of identity in the members of the second generation. The traditional scholarly approach allocates a role of deterrence to the first generation in the process of adaptation of the second generation to the American lifestyle, thus locating one of the main reasons behind the lack of complete assimilation in the ethnic community itself (4). Nonetheless, the supposed influence of the community is not enough to erase the main reason behind the struggles of second-generation Chinese Americans who, together with the other Asian communities, were force to face the white racism who prevented them from a complete assimilation in the cultural and social American environment. The shared struggles coming from the model imposed by the "white America" (99) became a unifying bond by 1965, when the Asian communities became aware that conforming to the white model was not enough to build their identity as Asian Americans (98–99). The boundary among Asian American communities gained strength during the protests against the American involvement

in the Vietnam War (103) and with the blossom of a new cultural and literary exploration of being Asian American (115). As this rediscovery proceeded, second-generation Asian Americans started to refuse the stereotypes imposed by imperialism on the Asian communities and to carry their identity with pride rather than shame (123). If the sixties and early seventies marked the formation of a pan-Asian identity due to mainly political reason, the eighties and the nineties saw the rise of new struggles coming from both multicultural and integrationist approaches. If the economic development of China encouraged Chinese Americans to embrace the origin of their families without considering it a stigma, the integrationist pressure to conform to the American society became stronger after the collapse of institutionalised racism in the 1960s. At the same time, Chinese Americans had to fight the multicultural tendency of categorisation and of identifying the Chinese American community in a set of practices, traditions, and beliefs, thus increasing the danger of falling into stereotypical attitudes (126–128). Such struggles were described by Chinese American writers who became conscious of the need to fill "the missing content" usually represented by the lack of knowledge of Chinese culture (129). In opposing the view of the author Frank Chin, who claimed that "the so-called identity crisis among the young was really nothing more than the manifestation of 'white supremacist' thinking" (155), Chun argues that the crisis in the identity of second-generation Chinese Americans was caused by the troubles in resisting the powerful influence of American society and by the desire to completely conform to the models proposed by society itself. Thus, if the years between the 1930s and the 1960s were characterised by either a refusal of and separation from the American model or by the attempt to adapt to this model, the perspective of the last two decades focuses on "the distinctiveness of the experience of the American born." Consequently, the focus seems now to be on the celebration of the experiences of Chinese Americans as individuals rather than as members of an ethnic community (156-158).

4.4.3. Mixed-background heritage and the role of language

When discussing the formation of identity in children with a mixed background, Sarah J. Shin highlights the indisputable connection between identity and the process of learning a heritage language. In a family with mixed ethnic background, the term "heritage language" labels a language different from English which is used by the immigrant parent and potentially by the children (2010: 204). One of the reasons behind the lack of skills in the heritage language in children with a mixed background comes from social pressure. The attempt of the non-English speaking parent to merge in American society may lead to the adoption of English as the

standard language of the family, thus preventing children from correctly learning the heritage language (205). This mechanism mirrors Casado and Leung's acknowledgement of the importance of the mitigating effect that derives from practicing the immigrant's language in the process of migratory grief and in the nourishment of the immigrant's identity. At the same time, the social pressure experienced by first-generation immigrants is similar to the fluctuating relationship between second-generation Asian Americans and American society as underlined by Chun.

The mixed-background individual's possible hostile attitude towards the heritage language is one of the agents that activate the Ethnic Ambivalence/Evasion mechanism (Tse 2000: 186). This stage usually takes place during childhood and adolescence and it features negative behaviours towards the ethnic group of the immigrant parent, which is counteracted by the desire to be an integral part of the predominant society. The Ethnic Ambivalence/Evasion mechanism constitutes only one of the stages that are commonly located in the development of ethnic identity in people with a mixed background. The starting point is a desire for identification with the main culture, which then moves towards the awakening of the person's awareness of belonging to a minority group. This is then supported by a progressive exploration and acceptance of the minority culture. The individual finally erases the social and ethnic conflicts between the main culture and the minority one. The culmination of this process is the formation of a solid and conscious ethnic identity (186). Tse better explains the pattern of formation of ethnic identity by dividing the process into four main stages. The Ethnic Unawareness, as the name suggests, consists in a lack of awareness in the child regarding their being part of an ethnic minority. This unawareness usually ends when the child enters school age. The child then lives the Ethnic Ambivalence/Evasion stage which evolves into Ethnic Emergence during the first years of adulthood. At this point, the individual becomes aware of the impossibility to fully merge into the main culture and becomes interested in the belonging minority group. The final resolution comes with the Ethnic Identity Incorporation stage, when the identity conflicts are solved and the ethnic minority background is fully accepted (1999: 122).

4.5. Ghosts of forgotten roots

Supported by the studies on ethnic identity which were illustrated in the previous section, it is now argued that the ghosts in Tan's novel represent the stages of the formation of ethnic identity

in mixed-background individuals as explained by Tse. Moreover, it is argued that the progressive mutation of the protagonist's attitude towards the Chinese ghosts mirrors the gradual resolution of the ethnic conflicts which prevented her from the complete and serene acceptance of her Chinese origins. Various elements are identified as concurring to the progressive acceptance of her ethnic identity, namely the process of language learning, the visit to the father's homeland, and the final decision to adopt Kwan's Chinese surname. In particular, it is argued that the choice of the Chinese surname over the American one represents the complete and positive fulfilment of the ethnic identity process of the protagonist. This choice becomes a symbol of the protagonist's loss of desire to fit into the main society by proudly making society itself aware of her Chinese origins and, consequently, of her belonging to a certain ethnic minority.

In this context, Jauss' "horizon of expectations" assumes a cultural dimension rather than a historical one. This is due to the fact that readers are able to approach Tan's novel and to identify the issue of ethnic identity only by adopting an "horizon" which is necessarily supported by an awareness of the issue themselves. Thus, only a "horizon of expectations" which is grounded on proper criteria and on the knowledge of the topic of ethnic identity allows readers to fully understand Tan's use of the device of ghosts. Despite the recent publication date of the novel, which may affect the role of historical distance in the formation of the different horizons, it is still possible to create two "horizons of expectations" that respect Jauss' theory by considering the lack or solidity of knowledge regarding the topic.

4.5.1. Ethnic Unawareness

Olivia's Ethnic Unawareness stage is ascribable to a variety of factors. First, her Chinese father dies when Olivia is only four. This determines her impossibility to be in contact with the parent belonging to the minority group. Second, Olivia assures readers that, despite having a mixed background, she and her family completely conformed to the model of the "modern American family. We spoke English" (*HSS*, 6). English is the main language in the family and, consequently, the Chinese side of the mixed background is consciously neglected. Following Sarah Shin's identification of the connection between language and identity, it is evident how ignoring Chinese influences to conform to the main culture creates a fertile ground for identity issues in the mixed-background child. Thus, the father's death marks the loss of Olivia's only and strongest connection with her Chinese side.

Olivia's unawareness of her mixed-background condition is also underlined when, while depicting her family as the standard American one, she affirms that "[s]ure, we ate Chinese food, but take-out, like everyone else" (*HSS*, 6). This sentence brings to the identification of two problematic behaviours towards the minority group in Olivia's family. On the one hand, there is the belief that occasional consumption of ethnic food can be considered as affirmation or even celebration of the Chinese side of the family. On the other hand, this belief is still contaminated with the pressure deriving from the will to conform to American society, as Olivia carefully underlines that they only buy take-out Chinese food, as the majority of people. Thus, the attempt to somehow include Chinese culture in the family life results in a stereotyped approach that has harmful rather than positive results over the children's perception of their minority group.

Kwan's arrival from China is the turning point in the Ethnic Unawareness stage, as her presence makes Olivia aware of her belonging to an ethnic minority group and, consequently, shatters her solid belief of belonging to the main American society. The novel identifies the starting point of this identity crisis with an episode that the protagonist defines as "the day it first occurred to me to get rid of Kwan" (*HSS*, 10). After one of the friends of Olivia's brother asks Olivia if "that dumb Chink" is Olivia's sister, he also mocks her by asking if she is "a dumb Chink" too (*HSS*, 10). Confused by this bringing into question her being part of the main society, Olivia shouts that "[s]he's not my sister! I hate her! I wish she'd go back to China!" (*HSS*, 10). The episode marks the end of Olivia's stage of Ethnic Unawareness in its mirroring the experience of comparison among children in school as theorised by Lucy Tse.

4.5.2. Ethnic Ambivalence/Evasion

This stage occupies the majority of the novel. It is also the one that most strongly describes Olivia's identity struggles through her approach to Kwan's belief in ghosts.

After the loss of her most important boundary with China, Olivia loses another fundamental element of her identity, namely her Chinese surname. After her mother's second marriage, she first has to adopt the Italian name Laguni and later willingly changes it in Bishop, her husband's one. In trying to erase any possible link with the minority group, Olivia demonstrates that she is now living in the Ethnic Evasion stage, although she occasionally tends towards Ethnic Ambivalence. In particular, the Ethnic Ambivalence approach can be found in her attitude towards Chinese language. When discussing the attitude towards heritage language during the Ethnic Ambivalence/Evasion phase, Tse highlights how the mixed-background person's

attitude towards the heritage language may reflect the attitude towards the ethnic minority as a whole (2000: 186). This is particularly true if Olivia's attitude towards Chinese language through the book is taken into consideration. Since young Olivia and Kwan share the bedroom, Olivia is exposed to the process of learning the minority language that she did not have the opportunity to assimilate due to her father's death. Chinese language becomes the strongest link with her minority group which accompanies the protagonist through the whole novel. Chinese is also the secret language that Kwan uses to tell Olivia about the ghosts that she claims to see and that she calls "yin people". Although the process of language learning starts at a young age, adult Olivia is not fully proficient due to her refusal to completely engage with her Chinese side. Thus, her behaviour reflects Tse theory of the heritage language as mirroring the mixed-background person's attitude towards the ethnic minority.

Focusing now on Kwan's experience as first-generation immigrant, a specific episode significantly exemplifies the reaction to the social pressure of conforming to the main culture as highlighted by Casado and Leung. After a terrified Olivia talks to her mother about Kwan's ghosts, Olivia's stepfather brings Kwan to a mental health institute. During her traumatic hospitalization Kwan tells Olivia that "[w]hen the doctors and nurses ask me questions, I treat them like American ghosts – I don't see them, don't hear them, don't speak to them. Soon they'll know they can't change me" (*HSS*, 14). Her obstinacy in believing in Chinese ghosts despite the American doctors' attempts to change her suggests her refusal to conform to the standards of American society. Consequently, her firm belief in ghosts corresponds with the strength of her Chinese identity which she does not lose even if she later starts a new life in the U.S. This point of view on the relationship between Kwan and her Chinese ghosts underlines Kwan's boundary to her homeland and expands Ken-fang Lee's suggestion that "[f]or Kwan, the ghosts are both the haunting past and the linkage to who she is, and cannot be left behind" (2004: 117). Quite the opposite, Olivia's hostile approach to Kwan's belief in Chinese ghosts is equivalent to her hostility towards her Chinese identity which she struggles to accept. Thus, her attitude perfectly fits into the typical behaviour adopted by the mixed-background person during the Ethnic Ambivalence/Evasion stage.

Another index of the development of Olivia's approach to her identity can be identified in her response to Kwan's narration of her previous life in 19th century China. Lee argues that Kwan's narration is symbol of a "cultural memory that a migrant cannot forget or eradicate" (2004: 117) and that "needs retelling and recollecting" (118). Thus, Kwan's narrative assumes the same role that oral transmission plays in some cultures to deliver cultural and social meanings. Moreover, the fact that Kwan uses Chinese language to tell the story strengthens the identification of

cultural intents behind her words. As Olivia progressively accepts the Chinese part of her identity, she also progressively loses her scepticism towards Kwan's ghosts and towards the truthfulness of Kwan's narration of her previous life. At the end of the novel, after Kwan's disappearance, Olivia's full acceptance of her identity is cathartically translated into the belief in the authenticity of Kwan's story. The issue of identity is addressed also in Kwan's narration. One of the characters also has a mixed-background and he expresses Olivia's same issues concerning identity when he wonders "I have been both Chinese and foreign, this makes me neither. […] Tell me, whom do I belong to? What country? What people? What family?" (*HSS*, 133).

4.5.3. Ethnic Emergence

Olivia starts displaying signs of the Ethnic Emergence stage right before her departure for China. One of the strongest elements that contribute to the reinforcement of the interest in the minority group is shown through the link between identity and name.

After Olivia and her husband, Simon, decide to divorce, Olivia ponders what surname she should choose between Laguni and Yee. Her mother suggests that she keeps Bishop, which is Simon's surname, and she tells Olivia that "There aren't any other Yees you're related to in this country. So who's going to care?" (*HSS*, 140). The suggestion of preferring an English surname to Italian and Chinese ones reinforces not only the social function of the surname in the determination of a person's identity, but also the pressure of expressing one's incorporation into the main society, even if this incorporation requires the abandonment of Olivia's only connection with the ethnic minority group she belongs to. Despite this, Olivia shows a certain change in her approach to the minority group. Such change is explicit not only in her considering the possibility of adopting the Chinese surname, but also because "[a]s I think more about my name, I realize I've never had any sort of identity that suited me, not since I was five at least, when my mother changed our last name in Laguni" (*HSS*, 140–141). She then underlines that her mother "didn't bother with Kwan's. Kwan's name remained Li" (*HSS*, 141). Olivia's mother choice of not changing Kwan's surname after her adoption may be due to different reasons. On the one hand, the choice of Olivia's mother to let Kwan keeping her Chinese surname may be a reminder of her not being an integral part of the family, thus casting the shadow of segregation over this choice. On the other hand, if the boundary between identity and names is taken into consideration, this choice empowers Kwan and puts her in a better

position than Olivia, since Kwan's solidity of her Chinese identity is confirmed also by her keeping her Chinese surname.

A second crucial factor in Olivia's Ethnic Emergence is her journey to China. The visit assumes two different meanings for Kwan and Olivia. On the one hand, the journey becomes for mixed-background Olivia a necessary experience to reconcile with the Chinese half of her identity. On the other hand, the indissoluble boundary between Kwan and her homeland is mirrored by Kwan's disappearance in one of the caves outside the village of Changmian. Thus, if Olivia returns to her own homeland, the U.S., Kwan remains in China, where she belongs. Moreover, the parallelism between the discovery of Oliva's identity and the progressive acceptance of Kwan's ghastly stories shows when she arrives in Changmian and "realize why Changmian seems so familiar. It's the setting for Kwan's stories, the ones that filter into my dreams. […] And being here, I feel as if the membrane separating the two halves of my life has finally been shed" (*HSS*, 185). Ruth Maxey critically highlights Tan's tendency of depicting China as an exciting land of amazement and supernatural traditions if compared with the repetitive peacefulness of the U.S., thus falling into the orientalist tendency of stereotyping China (2005: 2). The identification of a problematic orientalist tendency in Tan's depiction of China is an agreeable point, especially when it coincides with the reinforcement of Western stereotypes that tend to deliver a grotesque depiction of the country. Still, it is here argued that China and the U.S. in Tan's novel are metaphorical spaces in which the characters move, rather than the author's attempt to accurately portray the two countries.

Olivia's Ethnic Emergence also coincides with a rediscovery of her boundary with Kwan, towards whom she behaves in progressively less hostile way. This process of reconciliation culminates in Olivia's acceptance of Kwan's alleged ability to see ghosts and in her believing in Kwan's story of her past life. The exploration of sisterhood between Kwan and Olivia assumes not only a biological meaning, but it allows Tan to create a cultural and ethnic exploration of the differences between the two women (Yu, S.-L. 2006: 348). Olivia's journey through the stages of her ethnic identity corresponds not only with the change in her behaviour towards Kwan's ghosts, but also towards Kwan herself. Thus, Kwan becomes "an unconscious guide to Olivia's journey toward […] an increased consciousness of her roots and ethnic identity" (348) and the most powerful tool that she uses to do so are the ghosts that populate her stories.

4.5.4 Ethnic Identity Incorporation

The conclusive stage that marks Olivia's acceptance of her identity spans through the very last chapters of the novel. After Kwan's disappearance in Changmian, Olivia finds the proof that Kwan's story about her being the reincarnation of the Chinese girl Nunumu was true. This also implies Olivia's belief in being an integral part of the story as the reincarnation of Nelly Banner, Nunumu/Kwan's friend. This is the breaking point that determines the complete loss of Olivia's scepticism and hostility towards Kwan. In accepting the concept of reincarnation Olivia finally abandons her rigidity towards her sister and, implicitly, towards her identity. The demolition of the rationality to which Olivia clung through the whole book is welcomed with relief once she understands that her boundary with Kwan is going to last despite her sister's death.

After Olivia's return to the U.S., readers are aware that she has now completely accepted her belonging to the ethnic minority group. Rather than explicitly giving different proves of this new awareness, Tan decides to focus of Olivia's choice of adopting Kwan's surname and of giving the same surname to her new-born daughter. In adopting her sister's surname, Olivia demonstrates that she found a resolution not only to her struggling relationship with Kwan, but also to the uncertainties linked with her identity. As Olivia asks herself "[w]hat's a family name if not a claim to being connected in the future to someone from the past?" (*HSS*, 320), she shows that she not only accepted her Chinese side, but that she feels ready to proudly claim it as part of her heritage. Finally, she also realises the meaning of Kwan's ghosts.

> I think Kwan intended to show me the world is not a place but the vastness of the soul. And the soul is nothing more than love, limitless, endless, al that moves us towards knowing what is true. I once thought love was supposed to be noting but bliss. I now know it is also worry and grief, hope and trust. And believing in ghosts-that's believing that love never dies. (*HSS*, 320)

Conclusion

The aim of this thesis was a reflection on the re-elaboration of the traditional literary device of ghosts and on how this re-elaboration promoted a renewed approach to *The Haunting of Hill House* and to *The Haunting Secret Senses.* The fundamental starting point of this analysis was Hans Rober Jauss' framework of the "horizon of expectations," which offered an established theoretical support that is located in the literary theory of the reader-response criticism. In explaining the link between historical periods and literature, Jauss clarifies the importance of contextualisation to identify the set of beliefs that create the different "horizons of expectation." Following Jauss' pattern, this thesis gave particular importance to contextualisation and to providing a good degree of background knowledge on the topics of mental illness in the American 1950s/1960s and on the process of identity-building. This choice is justified by the belief that a higher degree of preparation regarding a precise topic allocates readers the opportunity to approach a literary text with the tools that permit a better fruition of the text itself. Thus, providing an overview of the literary and cultural tradition of ghosts in Western and Chinese frameworks seemed particularly reasonable to allow the recognition of the re-elaboration of the device of ghosts. The chronological account of the literary tradition linked with ghosts wanted to allow readers to locate *The Haunting of Hill House* and *The Hundred Secret Senses* in this tradition in the light of the analysis of the re-elaboration of the use of ghosts. Moreover, the studies conducted on social stigma and on the identity-building pattern in mixed-background people provided an academically appropriate outline to support the untraditional role of ghosts in both novels.

The analysis of *The Haunting of Hill House* highlighted Jackson's adherence to the tradition of the ghost story, as exemplified by the similarities between the description of Hill House and of Poe's mansion in his "The Fall of the House of Usher". Still, her fascination with such tradition did not halt her from making her narration deviate from the canonical pattern of supernatural phenomena producing fear in readers. Although the gothic element is irrefutably present in the novel, it has been shown how Jackson modelled the canon to create an alternative role of ghosts in her narration. In this sense, Jauss' theory is particularly appropriate in the importance that historical distancing plays when considering the issue of social stigma over mental health in the American 1950s and 1960s. In its being an example of the contrast between two "horizons of expectations," the analysis of Jackson's novel shows how the knowledge of the set of beliefs that constitute the past "horizon" helps contemporary readers with the creation of the

contemporary "horizon." Since historical distancing applied to the historical period in which readers are living may result particularly difficult, knowing the past attitude towards a certain topic allows an easier consideration of the contemporary way of approaching the same topic. This is the fundamental mechanism that allowed the analysis of the use of a paranormal investigation and of supernatural events as tools to bring the attention of readers on the attitude of the characters towards the protagonist. Consequently, the secondary sources that constitute the contextualisation on social stigma allowed the creation of parallelisms between the behaviours of the characters and the behaviours of the society in which Jackson lived. In this sense, the analysis of *The Haunting of Hill House* fits the need of historical distancing as theorised by Jauss and it also highlights the importance of a sociological approach.

The analysis of *The Hundred Secret Senses* started from a different premise if compared with Jackson's novel. The two variables that defined such difference are the year of publication of the novel and the central topic of the narration itself. Tan's novel was published in 1995 and it focuses on the experience of a mixed-background woman who discovers her origins. In this case, the temporal proximity of the publication to contemporary readers which, as already underlined, makes historical distancing difficult, is exacerbated by the central topic of the novel. Since the end of the 20th century and the first two decades of the 21st century share the characteristics of globalisation and multiculturalism, an approach similar to the previous one is complicated. In the case of Jackson's novel, the variables involved in the topic of social stigma allowed readers to consider the differences in the view of the topic from two distinct perspectives, namely the 1950s/1960s society and the contemporary one. In the case of Tan's novel, the secondary sources involved the analysis of the experience of three categories of multicultural individuals divided in at least two generations. Such analysis highlighted the presence of recurring elements that concur to the lives of these three categories. It is right the recurrence of these common elements that determine the difficulty in applying Jauss' theory of historical distancing in its original form. Thus, a binary approach to Jauss' theory emerged from the considerations linked with the analysis of Tan's novel. If Jackson's novel required historical and social distancing to consider the set of beliefs of the past "horizon," thus taking into consideration two spheres of public life, Tan's novel involved the study of a topic that touches the single person rather than the community. Although, as demonstrated by the secondary sources on the topic, community plays an important role in the formation of identity, the process takes place on a private and personal level rather than on a public one.

In the light of these considerations, this thesis presents two final findings. First, the analysis of the two novels according to Jauss' theory strengthens not only the validity of the reader-oriented criticism, but also the unavoidable importance of readers in the fruition of a literary text. Second, the results of the analysis of the two novels suggest the possibility of involving a wider variety of elements in the creation of the "horizons of expectations." As seen, the approaches to the two novels rely on both public and personal dimensions for a better understanding of the re-elaboration of the device of ghosts. If the analysis of *The Haunting of Hill House* adheres to Jauss' theory in its following a socio-historical approach, the analysis of *The Hundred Secret Senses* requires the involvement of some knowledge on Chinese culture and on the struggles that immigrants coming from a different culture or people with a mixed background have to face in their daily lives. The analysis of ghosts under this light bring to the final conclusion that the creation of the "horizon of expectations" derives from both a public and a private perspective. In addition to the socio-historical approach, readers' personal attitude towards a certain topic and the extent of background knowledge related to that same topic reinforce and help the understanding of messages which may have been overlooked in the past. These considerations bring to the identification of the double nature of the "horizons" as constituted by public and private. In conclusion, it is possible to affirm that this public and personal nature of the "horizons of expectations" bring to the identification of the "horizons" not only in groups of readers who are historically distant from each other, but also in each reader as a single and independent beneficiary of the ever-changing, inspiring dialogue that flows from a literary text.

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